

App. Serial No.: 10/783,955

Atty. Docket No.: 0028-014

REMARKS

These remarks are in response to the Office Action dated April 17, 2008, which has a shortened statutory period for response set to expire July 17, 2008. No extension of time is required.

Claims

Claims 1-29 are pending in the above-identified application. Claims 1-29 are rejected over prior art. Claims 1 and 14 are amended, and Claim 2 is canceled. Claims 3-13 and 15-29 remain as filed. Reconsideration is requested.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 102 and § 103

Claims 1, 2, 8-11, 14-18, and 24-27 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by DE 101 02 413 C1 (Jager). Claims 3-7, 12, 13, 19-23, 28, and 29 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 as being unpatentable over Jager. Applicant appreciates the Examiner's clear statement of grounds for rejection. The citations to specific portions of the cited reference were particularly helpful to Applicant in preparing this response.

The claims are amended herein to obviate the rejections over Jager. In particular, the limitations of Claim 2 are amended into independent Claims 1 and 14, thereby obviating all of the rejections except the rejection of Claim 2, which is now relevant to Claims 1 and 14. Furthermore, Claims 1 and 14 are amended herein to clarify the position of the mechanical interface of the front wall. Although the amendments made herein technically render the current rejections moot, Applicant will address the rejection of Claim 2, because that rejection is still at least partially relevant to independent Claims 1 and 14.

With respect to the limitations of original Claim 2 (now in Claims 1 and 14), the Examiner writes:

... the rear wall having a frame which projects above the walls surrounding the controller and having a plurality of mechanical interfaces for the manipulator (see gantry 38 of figure 1).

Jager teaches the top rear-wall part which projects beyond the process platform has a cover sheet that separates the working space 12 from the outside (see col. 5, lines 31-35).

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Applicant respectfully points out that the cited passage of Jager discloses only "covering sheets," which cannot be fairly considered an interface panel. The covering sheets of Jager are generally used to prevent dirt from entering, or people from reaching into, dangerous working spaces. One of ordinary skill in the art would immediately recognize that equipping the covering sheets of Jager with mechanical interfaces would be unthinkable, because covering sheets do not have sufficient mechanical stability for this purpose. There is simply no disclosure, or even a suggestion, in Jager that the covering sheets are, or can be, equipped with mechanical interfaces for fixing a process module that manipulates work pieces.

Applicant also notes that the fixing of the gantry 38 is not described in detail in Jager. However, it would appear from the figures of Jager that the gantry is fixed to the left vertical strut of the "rigid stand 36" in the back. In any case, there is no suggestion that the gantry 38 is mounted to a covering sheet.

Additionally, the Examiner indicates that Jager teaches (in part): "the front wall having a supply module with loading spaces 14 and 15 with carriers 16 and 17." Applicant respectfully disagrees. Rather, it appears that the "front wall" of Jager simply includes some kind of "drawers" that allow insertion of workpiece carriers, but no mechanical interface for fixing a supply module at the front wall.

Without admitting the propriety of the rejection, Applicant has amended Claims 1 and 14 to further clarify this distinction over Jager. In particular, Claims 1 and 14 now each recite (in part): "the top rear-wall part being designed as a frame, on the front side of which an interface panel is fixed which has the first plurality of mechanical interfaces." (emphasis added) Support for this amendment is clearly provided at Page 15, Lines 3-4. No new matter is added.

In Jager, the loading spaces and workpiece carriers are obviously behind the "front wall." On the front side of the front wall, there are obviously no mechanical interfaces at which the supply module (i.e., the workpiece carriers, in the Examiner's characterization of Jager) could be fixed. Rather, the supply module equipment is permanently integrated into the base

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framework, and no modular assembly is possible. In contrast to Jager, according to Applicant's invention, the mechanical interface 50 on the front side of the front wall allows arranging and coupling of any supply module in front of the base framework, such as a drawer module, a stacking module or a conveyor module, as desired by the user. This provides a clear advantage over the prior art.

For at least the foregoing reasons, Applicant respectfully asserts that independent Claims 1 and 14 are distinguished over the cited prior art. Claims 3-13 and 15-29 depend, either directly or indirectly, from either Claim 1 or Claim 14 and are, therefore, distinguishable over the cited prior art for at least the same reasons.

For the above reasons Applicant requests withdrawal of all of the rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 102 and § 103.

Applicant believes Claims 1 and 3-29 are now in condition for allowance. Should the Examiner undertake any action other than allowance of Claims 1 and 3-29, or if the Examiner has any questions or suggestions for expediting the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is requested to contact Applicant's undersigned attorney at (269) 279-8820.

Respectfully submitted,

Date: 7/17/08



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CERTIFICATE OF FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION (37 CFR 1.8(a))

I hereby certify that this paper (along with any referred to as being attached or enclosed) is being transmitted via facsimile, on the date shown below, to: MS Amendment, Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450, at (571) 273-8300.

Date: 7/17/08


Larry E. Henneman, Jr.